



DEBRA BOWEN

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE NEWS RELEASE

DB12:110

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 7, 2012

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Final California Election Turnout and Results? Many Ballots Still to be Processed by County Elections Officials

SACRAMENTO – During each state general election cycle, hundreds of thousands of ballots are not counted on Election Day. After each statewide election, California county elections officials have 31 days to ensure every eligible ballot is counted accurately and then certify final election results to the state's chief elections official. For the November 6 General Election, county elections officials have until December 4 to finish processing ballots and until December 7 to report their certified vote counts to California Secretary of State.

While the Secretary cannot announce the winner of a contest before all ballots are counted, news media or campaigns sometimes choose to call an election sooner. In close contests, a clear winner may not be apparent for many days, as county elections officials verify and count hundreds of thousands of unprocessed ballots that include vote-by-mail ballots and provisional ballots cast at polling places. Depending on the volume of these types of ballots, it may take the full amount of time allowed by law for county elections officials to verify voter records and determine if ballots have been cast by eligible voters.

“California has more registered voters than any other state in the nation. It’s understandable some people want election returns immediately, but it’s more important than ever to get results right rather than get results fast,” said Secretary of State Debra Bowen, California’s chief elections official. “Voting by mail has increased significantly in recent years and with many people returning vote-by-mail ballots on Election Day, county elections officials need the full month to finish their important work.”

In processing vote-by-mail ballots, elections officials must confirm each voter’s registration status, verify each voter’s signature on the vote-by-mail envelope, and ensure each person did not vote elsewhere in the same election. Other ballots that are processed after Election Day include provisional ballots (processed similar to vote-by-mail ballots), and ballots that are damaged or cannot be machine-read and must be remade by elections officials.

As with past statewide elections, Secretary Bowen has asked all county elections officials to report the number of unprocessed ballots they have on hand so she can provide a statewide tally to the public. The numbers of ballots left to count – as voluntarily reported by county elections officials – will be posted November 8 at vote.sos.ca.gov/unprocessed-ballots-status. The website will be updated each time a county elections official provides an updated report, which they have been urged to do as often as possible.

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Many state and federal laws and mandates must be followed during this official canvass period before the election results can be certified. County elections officials must, among other things:

- Audit all materials returned from polling places to ensure all ballots – voted, un-voted, spoiled, provisional, vote-by-mail, surrendered vote-by-mail – are accounted for.
- Ensure the signature on each vote-by-mail ballot envelope matches the signature on the voter's original voter registration form.
- Research all voters who cast provisional ballots to ensure each person was registered to vote and did not vote more than once.
- Remake ballots that machines cannot tabulate because of wrinkles, smudges or other damage
- Hand-count votes for qualified write-in candidates.
- Sort all vote-by-mail ballots by precinct so they can be manually audited.
- Manually audit 100 percent of the ballots from one percent of the precincts in the county to ensure the results are accurate, according to state elections law.
- Manually audit 100 percent of the voter verified paper audit trail to ensure votes cast on direct recording electronic machines were tabulated accurately, according to voting system use procedures.
- Audit all voting equipment to ensure it was properly secured and was not tampered with.
- Investigate any voter who voted more than once.

Election results will continue to be updated at vote.sos.ca.gov. The Secretary of State's election results website will be updated as county elections officials report results. County elections officials sometimes update their own websites before reporting to the Secretary of State. County contact information is at www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_d.htm.

After county elections officials certify their final results by December 7, the Secretary then has seven days to review the material, clear up any reporting discrepancies and compile the 58 county reports before certifying the complete election results on December 14.

For more details on the election reporting process, visit vote.sos.ca.gov/frequently-asked-questions/#website.

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